

Ysceifiog

SJ 1520 7150
19950

Introduction

Ysceifiog lies towards the end of a flattish spur projecting south-westwards from Halkyn Mountain and the Flintshire plateau. The River Wheeler lies to the south and a converging tributary to the west, both in steeply cut valleys. The church is on flat ground, level with the ever broadening spur to the north-east, but much of the village is at a slightly lower altitude to the west. The settlement is served by minor lanes, though the main A541 runs in the Wheeler Valley below. Mold is 11km to the south-east, Caerwys some 3km to the north-west.

This brief report examines the emergence and development of Ysceifiog up to the year 1750. For the more recent history of the settlement, it will be necessary to look at other sources of information and particularly at the origins and nature of the buildings within it.

The accompanying map is offered only as an indicative guide to the historic settlement. The continuous line defining the historic core offers a visual interpretation of the area within which the settlement developed, based on our interpretation of the evidence currently to hand. It is not an immutable boundary line, and will need to be modified as new discoveries are made. The map does not show those areas or buildings that are statutorily designated, nor does it pick out those sites or features that are specifically mentioned in the text.

We have not referenced the sources that have been examined to produce this report, but that information will be available in the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust. Numbers in brackets are primary record numbers used in the HER to provide information that is specific to individual sites and features. These can be accessed on-line through the Archwilio website (www.archwilio.org.uk).



Ysceifiog, photo 95-c-0177, © CPAT, 2012

History of development

Ysceifiog (otherwise Ysgeifiog) appears as both *Schiviau* and *Schinan* in Domesday Book in 1086, a name which, the most recent authorities tell us, is derived from *ysgeifiog*, the English meaning of which is 'sloping [place]'. *Sceinoc* appears in the records between 1186 and 1204, and the Norwich Taxation of 1254 terms the church *Esceyvauc*, while the later Lincoln Taxation (of 1291) has it as *Skeynyanc*. By the Tudor era, the name was taking on its present form, as with *Yskeifioc* in the period 1550-1562.

Its origins and development are obscure. There is nothing to suggest that a church was founded here in the early medieval era, though that remains a possibility. It has even been postulated that Ysceifiog could have been a mother church for the area before the Conquest, but the evidence is ambiguous.

In 1699 Lhwyd noted that there were five houses by the church at Ysceifiog and the situation half a century later appeared to be little different. Overall, there is nothing to suggest that in the past this was a settlement of any size.

The heritage to 1750

St Mary's church (102542) was rebuilt in 1836-7 in the Early English style, replacing a medieval church of which only a little is known. The earlier church was partly Norman in design, and the aisled building with its western tower was depicted in a Moses Griffith sketch of 1782. Lewis in the 1830s mentioned a 'very elegant Norman doorway, now walled up, the mouldings of which are richly ornamented and in an excellent state of preservation'. Thomas noted that the remains of a still earlier church were encountered in the 19th century whilst digging out a cellar for heating apparatus. From its predecessor the present church exhibits a few fragments of medieval stained glass, the bowl of a Perpendicular font and the west porch contains the 14th century effigy of a priest.

The churchyard (19927) is large and sub-rectangular in shape. There is no sign of curvilinearity and no indication that there has previously been a circular 'llan'. The base, part of the shaft and the remains of the head of a churchyard cross (100263) survive in the churchyard.

The layout of the village has changed fundamentally over the last three hundred years. An estate map of 1738 though of small-scale reveals that there were small tracts of open common to the west and east of the church. These had been largely infilled by 1805 when another estate map was prepared, on the west by houses from the church wall as far as Northgate Cottages, and on the east by the Old Rectory and its grounds. Five or six buildings lay around the southern and in one instance the western edges of these commons. An earlier estate map, from 1716, depicts the church and a single house on the land immediately to the west of the church, but this is almost certainly an incorrect picture, resulting from an inadequate survey. Immediately to the south of the village there were several relict open-field strips and it can be assumed that open fields had been extensive elsewhere in the parish.

Ffynnon Fair (102543), is a brick-covered - or stone covered (RCAHMW) - well lying some 300m to the north of the church.

There are no buildings of any antiquity in the village, and though there are five Grade II listed buildings, they are all later than 1750. The Old Rectory to the east of the church dates to 1780, and the Fox Inn and its stables, School House (dated 1851) and the Community Hall (formerly the National School of 1817) are all more recent.



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